

In Support of SB 1035 and HB 6425

Testimony from Frederick McNulty

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I live in Cheshire, where the horrific home invasion and triple homicide took place in 2007. I knew the victims. The mother, Jennifer Hawke-Petit, was a nurse at my elementary school. Hayley Petit, the older sister, had gone to the same middle school as I. And I talked with the younger daughter, Michaela Petit, on the school bus almost every day. Mere days before she was killed, Michaela had added me as a friend on Facebook. Their home was two blocks from mine. If anyone has a good reason to support maintaining the death penalty in Connecticut, it should be me.

I understand and sympathize with Dr. William Petit Jr.'s strong position in favor of executing his family's murderers; I cannot fathom the pain that he must live with for the rest of his life. And I realize that many in Cheshire — in fact, most of Connecticut — supports maintaining the death penalty, especially as it applies to the Cheshire killers.

But I can't agree. I do not oppose state-funded execution on moral grounds. It is not the government's job to regulate morality, and that is not the purpose of our criminal justice system, either. Its job should be to punish convicted criminals, and to deter future crime.

But the death penalty has never been conclusively proven to deter crime. In fact, the majority of studies say the death penalty isn't a deterrent, or in some instances may cause additional crime. It is also outdated, biased, wildly expensive and unnecessary. Assuaging the emotions of some should not have such real-life consequences for us all.

According to Amnesty International, two-thirds of the countries in the world have abolished state-funded execution. The United States is among the five industrialized nations that have yet to do so. The European Union forbids any of its member countries to have the death penalty. Yet, in the United States, only 15 states (plus Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C.) have done away with state-funded executions.

In 2009, the United States executed the fifth largest number of people in the world, falling right between Saudi Arabia and Yemen. And the American Civil Liberties Union reports that 138 inmates on death row in American prisons have been found innocent of the crimes for which they were convicted.

Study after study has shown that race and socioeconomic status of the convicted person and the victim play huge roles when it comes to who gets placed on death row. This likely stems in part from a disproportionate number of Caucasian defense lawyers, the number of people of color living below the poverty line and damaging stereotypes.

As The Courant recently reported, since 1973 Connecticut has spent nearly \$200 million pursuing the death penalty. Each case on death row can take anywhere from \$5 million to \$10 million per year to process. The 35 states that have not abolished state-funded execution are spending obscene amounts of money on it — money that could be put toward crime prevention, providing services to victims' families and other honorable efforts, all the while keeping the criminals locked away forever.

I most especially disagree with my state representative, Al Adinolfi (another neighbor of mine and the Petit family), who was reported to have said last year that anyone opposing the death penalty "must love" the accused killers, Steven Hayes and Joshua Komisarjevsky. We in Connecticut must not let that kind of muddled thinking cloud the vital debate about whether to end the death penalty.

I urge the members of the Judiciary Committee to support a bill to repeal the death penalty in Connecticut.